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RUEHRH/AMEMBASSY RIYADH 7746
RUEHTV/AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV 1837
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DEPARTMENT FOR PA, NEA/ARN, INR/IC/CD, INR/R/MR:STHIBEAULT AND
JMCCARTER, VOA NEWS CA, NEA/PPD:CBOURGEOIS, AZAIBACK, AND
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SUBJECT: Lebanon, Palestinian Territories, Syria/Iran,
Syria/Europe, Syria/Italy (6/22-25)

¶1. Summary: Syrian papers on June 25 reported the car bomb that killed six UNIFIL peacekeepers from a Spanish contingent patrolling a road in the southern Lebanese village of Khiam on June 24, the first such attack on the UN Interim Force in Lebanon since it was reinforced last summer after the 34-day war between Israel and Hezbollah. All papers featured FM Mouallem's phone call to Spanish FM Moratinos condemning the crime, expressing his condolences for the families of the victims and sending his best wishes to the injured for a quick recovery. Independent daily Al-Watan pointed out that Lebanese Forces Leader Samir Geagea had warned earlier against targeting UNIFIL troops, implying he may have had a hand in the attack.

As for developments in the Palestinian arena, papers on June 25 reported FM Mouallem's meeting on June 24 with Abbas Zaki, envoy of Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas, in which Mouallem reiterated the importance of stopping the current deterioration in the Palestinian territories and urging Palestinians to resort to dialogue to solve the crisis.

Papers on June 25 also reported FM Mouallem's meeting on June 24 with Iranian Assistant Foreign Minister Mohammad Reza Baqiri focusing on regional developments, mainly in Lebanon, Iraq and the occupied territories.

Government-owned Al-Thawra, the only paper to appear on June 22, reported President Asad's meeting on June 21 with Caspar Einem, Chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee of the Austrian Parliament. The meeting touched on the current situation in the region, particularly in Iraq, the occupied Palestinian territories and Lebanon, and on Syria's stances regarding regional issues.

On Syrian-Italian relations, papers on June 25 reported Speaker of the People's Assembly Mahmoud al-Abrash's meeting on June 24 with Lamberto Dini, Chairman of the Italian Senate Foreign Relations and Expatriates Committee. Talks dealt with the situation in the region and the Arab-Israeli conflict, in addition to the Italian role in supporting the Syrian-European Association Agreement.

End of summary.

12. Selected Headlines:

"Eight Spanish troops of the UN Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) killed and wounded in al-Khiam valley. Syria denounces the action. Foreign Minister Mouallem calls Spanish FM Moratinos: We consider this act a criminal act that aims to destabilize South Lebanon. Hizbollah condemns the act" (Government-owned Al-Ba'th, 6/25)

"President Lahoud: Suspicious schemes to tamper with Lebanon's security" (Government-owned Tishreen, 6/25)

"Intermittent clashes in Nahr al-Bared. The Lebanese Army liquidates a sleeping cell in Abi Samra" (Government-owned Al-Ba'th, 6/25)

"Vice President Shara confers with Abbas Zaki, special envoy of Palestinian President, and with Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister Mohammad Reza Baqiri. Talks focus on means to overcome the current Palestinian crisis. Zaki: Syria has an accurate reading of the Palestinian case" (Government-owned Al-Thawra, 6/25)

"Al-Abrash, Speaker of the People's Assembly, confers with an Italian parliamentary delegation and Deputy President of the European Parliament. Dini: Occupation is the source of the problems in the region. Information Minister Bilal: Syria believes in dialogue as the best means for understanding and finding an atmosphere for peace and stability.

"One Palestinian martyred, 4 wounded in an Israeli raid on Gaza. Palestinian PM Haniyeh warns against Israeli blackmail, renews commitment to the Mecca Accord and confirms that the main battle is with the Israeli occupation" (Government-owned Tishreen, 6/25)

"Events in Nahr al-Bared still enflamed. US Ambassador Feltman foils the Arab initiative. President Lahoud will not turn authority over to the governing team and preserves his constitutional options" (Government-owned Al-Ba'th, 6/24)

"Palestinian Prime Minister Haniyeh calls for dialogue. Head of the Palestinian Authority Abbas heads to Jordan before Sharm al-Sheikh.

Israel exploits its aid to the Authority to promote discord" (Government-owned Tishreen, 6/24)

"The situation in Nahr al-Bared heads towards a decisive end. The Lebanese opposition: The governing team has foiled Arab mediation. Hizbollah SecGen Nasrallah to Arab League SecGen Mousa: We demand partnership on basis of volume of representation. Mousa: We offered constructive suggestions and we will return as we receive positive signs" (Government-owned Tishreen, 6/23)

"Lebanese MP Zo'eter: The team in authority is driving Lebanon towards the unknown" (Government-owned Tishreen, 6/23)

"Four demonstrators wounded in the Bel'in demonstration denouncing the separation wall. Israel unveils its intentions towards Palestinian Leader Abbas during the Quartet meeting" (Government-owned Tishreen, 6/23)

"US President Bush at the bottom of the least popular presidents list" (Government-owned Tishreen, 6/23)

"President Asad meets Austrian delegation: Europe's role is important and effective in solving issues of the region. Einem, Head of the Austrian Parliament Foreign Relations Committee, describes his talks in Damascus as fruitful and very useful" (Government-owned Al-Thawra, 6/22)

"A new bloody day for Americans in Iraq: 8 soldiers killed, raising the death toll to 3554" (Government-owned Tishreen, 6/24)

13. Editorial Block Quotes:

"Late Awakening"

Marwan Qabalan, an editorialist in independent al-Watan, wrote (6/24): "Egypt's pan-Arab role has greatly declined after the signing of the Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty in the late seventies.... Egypt regained a proportional role in the nineties but the past five years have seen an unprecedented decline in Cairo's Arab and regional role, which did not go beyond what was happening in Gaza...."

"Last week we saw a sudden Egyptian awakening. Cairo, through its foreign minister, discovered that what happened in Gaza threatens Egyptian national security because Gaza is a stone's throw away from Egypt. Likewise, the Iranian role in Iraq threatens Arab and Egyptian security.... Recent statements by the Egyptian foreign minister have come as a real surprise to the Arab media and political circles, for they suggested that Egypt still thinks of Arab national security and sees itself as part of it, as if everything that has happened in the past five years was not linked to the security of Egypt and its Arab environment...."

"Blair's Quartet"

Maha Sultan, a commentator in government-owned Tishreen, wrote (6/24): "The appointment of Tony Blair as an envoy of the International Quartet would only render this international body less effective...."

"Blair's positions toward Arab issues, such as his participation in the Iraq war and his strong opposition to a cease-fire during Israel's aggression on Lebanon last summer, made Blair unpopular in

the region.

"How, then, could he be a special envoy to the region for negotiations to achieve peace there...? How could Palestinian and Arab parties that know his biased positions sit with him at one table? How could these parties trust his proposals when they know full well that he is more of an American-Israeli envoy than a spokesman for the international community...?"

"The US Administration's desire to give Blair this job is part of the American efforts to serve Israel's interests at the expense of Arab rights...."

"Least Popular, Stupidest President"

Muhyi-al-Din al-Muhammad, a columnist in government-owned Tishreen, wrote (6/24): "No one in the United States or abroad was surprised that President Bush's popularity rating, as shown by a recent Newsweek poll, has dropped to 26 percent...."

"This is a natural result of reckless policies that Bush and his extremist administration have pursued.... These policies, which have relied on aggression, occupation, and preemptive strikes, have reflected negatively on the United States' reputation, economy, and the lives of its soldiers without fulfilling any of the attractive promises that Bush has made since he declared his war on so-called terrorism...."

"The United States and the rest of the world are facing the challenge of how to deal with the stupidest and least popular American president during the remaining year and a half of his term in office.... There is a glimpse of hope in the opposition to President Bush's policies by Democrats and some Republicans..... We wonder how some Arabs are still attached to Bush's policies, promises, and plans, as if he were the wise man of his age!"

"Reshuffling of Cards"

Abd-al-Fattah al-Awad, Chief Editor of government-owned al-Thawra, wrote (6/22): "Syria's position toward Palestinian developments was expressed by Vice President Shara to foreign correspondents.... He stated it very clearly: 'We will not support one party against the other....'

"Syria, which does not absolve any of the parties, believes that dialogue is the only way to solve the problem.... What happened in the Palestinian territories was part of the sedition plan in the region.... It is painful that Arabs are not doing anything to stop it.... This is a serious and worrying Arab situation, and we have to reexamine the inclinations of those who want to absolve Israel of Arab blood.... Syria warns against the grave repercussions of this Arab situation, where, as Shara said, we are witnessing an unprecedented reshuffling of cards...."

"The Big Trick"

Isam Dari, Chief Editor of government-owned Tishreen, wrote (6/23): "Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert said that US President Bush wants a Palestinian state to emerge before the end of his term in office....

"Olmert did not explain to us and the rest of the world how this objective can be accomplished within this short period when it has not been accomplished over 15 years....

"Neither Olmert nor Bush told us what shape this state will take.... Will Jerusalem be its capital or Israel's unified and eternal capital...? What about the Palestinian right of return...? Will the Western world recognize the democratic choices of the Palestinian people?

"What Mr. Bush offers cannot fulfill the Palestinian people's national ambitions and aspirations.... The US Administration thinks of a demilitarized non-sovereign mini-state fulfilling Israel's ambitions and biblical dream."

"It would be a big tragedy to believe the Bush-Olmert lie. But the bigger tragedy would be to promote this lie, absolve the killer, and contribute to the satanic plan by delivering to Israel and the United States some of the Palestinian people as terrorists and handing them the entire Palestinian cause and all its rights in return for a serious lie they called 'the Palestinian state'...."

"We Will Not Close Our Border"

Ahmad Dawwa, an editorialist in government-owned Al-Thawra, wrote (6/22): "Vice President Shara said that Syria will not close its border with Lebanon, although some Lebanese politicians are working day and night to create the climate for such a step against the will of the Lebanese people.... Many Lebanese politicians will not allow this to happen because they stick to Lebanon's genuine interest and realize the importance of relations with Syria....

"Syria can never take a step harmful to any Arab country, let alone Lebanon, where any harm to the country affects Syria as well. This is why VP Shara stressed that it is impossible to reach a point where Syrian-Lebanese relations are beyond repair."